

SPANISH POLITICAL PRISONERS

"Let no one tell us that we are a small band too weak to attain the magnificent end we aim at.

Count and see how many are we who suffer injustice. Peasants who work for others, who eat the chaff and leave the wheat for their master - we are millions of men, we are so numerous that by ourselves we are the mass of the people. Workers who weave silk and velvet so we may be clothed in rags - we too, are a multitude and when the factory whistle gives us a moment's rest, we overflow the streets and squares like a roaring sea. Soldiers, under iron discipline, we who receive the bullets for which our officers get crosses and ribbons, we, poor fools who have known no better than to shoot our brothers - we have only to turn about-face and these braided personages who command us turn pale. All of us who suffer and are outraged - we are an immense mass - we are the ocean that can swallow up everything. When we have the will, a moment will suffice for justice to be done."

Kropotkin

Peter Kropotkin

He was born at Moscow in 1842, a time when there were vast private estates and, if he chose, Kropotkin could have lived the life of a wealthy aristocrat, the life of his father who had been absolute master of more than a thousand serfs. Instead, Kropotkin gave up his birthright title of Prince; the idea of anyone dictating the life of another human being enraged him. Like his great contemporary, Tolstoi, he left the Army ranks where he had been a Cossack officer. Kropotkin devoted himself to science, and he became eminent as a Siberian geographer and later as a social biologist whose theory of mutual aid cast a new light on the evolutionary process. But his studies and the life of misery around him convinced Kropotkin that the world needed explanation, yea, but even more, change to a better way of life. He became an anarchist revolutionist, and brought all his talent to bear on clarifying and systematizing anarchist thought in such libertarian classics as 'The Conquest of Bread', 'The Great French Revolution', 'Mutual Aid', 'Fields', 'Factories & Workshops' and 'Ethics'. For his beliefs, for his activities (he disliked being called a 'Philosophical Anarchist'), Kropotkin went to prison and into exile. Only once did he waver in his revolutionary beliefs; when the first world war broke out, he regarded the war as a 'lesser evil' than the defeat of France which he tended to think of as 'the mother of freedom' (though her prisons had held him). The Russian Revolution in 1917 brought him back from exile and, though 75 years old, he undertook what constructive work he could. But the Bolshevik seizure of power in October convinced him that the achievements of the Revolution were at an end; however, Kropotkin remained hopeful - the last year of his life, 1921, was spent at work on a study of the revolutionary outlook on ethics.

"Anarchy is the highest expression of Order"

E. Reclus.

As you may know, on the 22nd of October I was given liberty after 20 unbroken years of prison in Spain for illegal propaganda against the regime.

Before I came out the other prisoners gave me a message to spread through all the world, telling you of their plight. I promised then I would see to it that their message should reach the ends of the earth - and this is just what I am doing.

Everywhere I have been (since my release), I have found solidarity and support for the prisoners - Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, and now England, have shown me that they are not indifferent to the sufferings of others. Various newspapers have already published this message, and I myself am carrying on the work in my own small way, encouraged by the results, helpful as they are to the comrades I left behind in that living hell that I know so well.

They point out in their message that they are not being granted conditional liberty (i.e. remission of sentence) despite the fact that they are legally entitled to it. I have copied out in full the legal text concerned, making of it a draft letter, that you can send to the people who are responsible for implementing this prerogative of prisoners. I trust you will do this and in anticipation I extend to you warm thanks on behalf of the prisoners.

Here is a list of the libertarian prisoners and a short account of the prisons and sentences as they were on my release.

Names and length of sentences of libertarian prisoners suffering imprisonment in Spanish jails

Prison of Burgos

| | |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Fernando Carballo Blanco | 30 years |
| Marcelino Gimenez Cubo | 25 years |
| Angel Marquez | 30 years |
| Julio Moreno | 30 years |

Prison of Burgos (contd)

| | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Juan Salcedo | 72 years |
| Pedro Sanchez Perez | 30 years |
| Francisco Sanchez Ruano | 28 years |

Address:

Prision Central . Burgos . Spain

Prison of Soria

| | |
|------------------------|---------|
| Jaime Pozas de Villena | 6 years |
|------------------------|---------|

Address:

Prision Central . Soria . Spain

Prison of Segovia

| | |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Luis Andres Edo | 9 years |
| David Urbano Bermudez | 6 years |

Address:

Prision Central . Segovia . Spain

Prison of Ocana

| | |
|---------------|---------|
| Francisco Gil | 6 years |
|---------------|---------|

Address:

Prision Central . Ocana (Toledo) . Spain

Prison of Valencia

| | |
|------------------------------|----------|
| Floreal Roderiguez de la Paz | 18 years |
| Jose Luis Alonso Perez | 18 years |
| Salvador Soriano Martinez | 18 years |
| Angel Munoz Lopez | 20 years |
| Pedro Gallegos Sans | 6 years |
| Miguel de la Cueva | 6 years |

Address:

Prision Celular . Valencia . Spain

The following comrades have been recently released:

Alicia Mur (Alcala de Henares)

Antonio Canete (Palencia)

Miguel Garcia (Soria)

Juan Busquets (Burgos)

Domingo Ibars (Burgos)

the last three after 20 consecutive and unbroken years of prison.

Soria, Palencia and Jaen were fitted out as prisons for politicals in 1966. More recently - as a result of the hunger strike of December 1968 - the castle at Segovia was converted to take the 25 most important of the 67 prisoners in Soria, breaking the inter-prison coordination that existed.

Later they did an emergency conversion of Zamora prison to take 50 priests accused of being involved in the Basque liberation movement.

At present Burgos prison is the point where the most important members of that movement have accumulated, that city being the regional military head-quarters.

There is also the fortress at Santa Catalina, Cadiz, where the Jehovah's witnesses are sent.

Since the resurgence of the libertarian ideal in the universities of Madrid and Barcelona, as many as 300 students have been concentrated in the Prison Provincial de Madrid, better known as Carabanchel. At the time of my release there were some 60 libertarians held there, in gallery No.3.

It can be seen from the list that the libertarian prisoners receive the heaviest sentences, since there are only five with sentences below 18 years, though on the other hand there are two ETA (Basque) prisoners serving sentences of 20 and 30 years respectively.

The libertarian prisoners in Burgos were still tried by the infamous Act against 'Banditry & Terrorism', as were the 7 in Valencia (whose sentences are still awaiting confirmation after their appeal lodged with the Capitan General more than 6 months ago!). There has been much protest against the injustice done to these comrades in applying to them the law on 'Band-

ity & Terrorism', since their charge involved secret propaganda and the distribution of leaflets, lighters and pens bearing the black and red colours of the Spanish CNT (National Confederation of Workers). It seems that one accused was found in possession of a sub-machine gun and a pistol, though no one was able to prove that either had been used in a long time. What has become apparent from this is that the so-called 'Tribunal of Public Order' was created as a mere show of 'democracy' and that as soon as it feels like it, it makes judgement by such notorious legislation as the law on Banditry and Terrorism.

On the 5th of this month (March 1970) some libertarian comrades tried without success to kidnap the Spanish representative to UNESCO. In their first statements they declared that they did it in order to demand the liberty of their comrades. This shows how there lies in the minds of all libertarians the spirit of rebellion and protest against the crushing oppression to which our prisoner comrades are subjected.

About two months ago 15 prisoners escaped from the prison of Basauri in Bilbao. 10 of these were political prisoners and among these, 4 were priests. On their arrival in France one of the priests said: 'Political prisoners in Spain are treated worse than criminals.'

On November 4th 1969 the prisoners of Burgos declared a hunger strike, all other methods being exhausted.
IT IS THE ONLY WAY.

At this time in Burgos prison there are nine prisoners under the penalty of death imposed by Military Court Martial. As soon as the sentence is confirmed the prisoners have announced their intention to declare another hunger strike. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Miguel Garcia

Here is the message that a group of prisoners gave to Miguel before he came out.

Are there any political prisoners in Spain?

No, according to the prppaganda of the Franco regine. It is more particularly the opinion of Jose Maria Oriols, Minister of Justice. These denials have not prevented the General Prison Administration, a body directly attached to that ministry, recently to allocate the prisons of Soria, Jaen and Palencia to the detention of political prisoners. Later, the same decision was taken for the prisons of Segovia and Zamora; In this latter, 50 priests are serving their sentences.

The prisons of Soria and Segovia, now named Penal Centres, are of the 'closed' type, that is to say the regulations there are much more severe than in the other prisons. The prison population in these is distributed into groups 'A', 'B', 'C', who are not allowed to communicate. To 'A' group are ascribed the prisoners considered to be the most irreducible - the 'hard-headed ones' according to prison staff - and groups 'B' & 'C', in decreasing order, those prisoners who have rebelled the least during their detention.

On the 1st October 1969 there were in Soria 56 prisoners distributed into these three groups. Group A: 20 prisoners; Group B: 9 prisoners; Group C: 26 prisoners, the sentences varying between 3 years and 12 years + 1 day.

The A group, considered to be the hardest, is housed in the worst part of the prison in very cramped conditions - 154 square yards for 20 men to live in hour after hour, for months and years. These 154 sq. yards are divided in the following manner:- a refectory, which has also to be the room for study and for leisure, of 32 sq.y., a dormitory of 50 sq.y. where

beds are stuck butted to one another, and a little courtyard of 72 sq.y. which never sees the sun. The forced cohabitation in such a restricted space gives rise to unbearable nervous tensions which leads one to fear this will produce a series of mental breakdowns which would drive these prisoners into some desperate action.

The prisoners in group B enjoy the same amount of space. Their situation however, is more tolerable due to the fact that there are at the moment only 9 of them.

Group C, the one with the largest number of prisoners, have at their disposal, in comparison to the two previous groups, a vast amount of space. There too, as in the other groups, the refectory is used as a reading room and leisure room. As access to the dormitory is forbidden in the day-time, the living space is consequently reduced by that much.

So, not only are there political prisoners in Spain, but furthermore, they are the victims of a penal system much more severe than the one used in ordinary prisons. Faithful to the spirit of the declaration made by the General Inspector of Prisons, Fernando Arnao Garcia, "one must neither vanquish, nor convince political prisoners, but break them down", the staff on those establishments translate this declaration into daily facts, by forbidding the politicals to have access to the kitchens, or to speak to ordinary prisoners, or to carry out any duties (such as barber, teacher etc.). These duties are therefore carried out, for better or for worse, by ordinary prisoners. The 'politicals' are in this way deprived of the meagre advantages attached to the carrying out of these duties. Without any doubt, this is a discrimination wilfully thought out by the Governor.

Visiting Soria prisoners is difficult due to the fact that this town is quite a distance away from any large urban centre. The prisoners are allowed one visit a

week, which they usually do not get since their families cannot come to Soria frequently. Certainly the choice of Soria as a place to concentrate political prisoners is not a coincidence. The families, who, in spite of a lot of difficulties, manage to travel as far as Soria, and who stay two or three days in the town, cannot visit the prisoners each day, only once a week; this rule is adhered to in the most unbending fashion, no matter if for a whole year the prisoner has not had one single visit.

At Segovia, where the internal regulations are identical to those of Soria, are kept the prisoners considered to be as the most responsible. Some 40 prisoners are there split up into groups that cannot communicate between one another. Jaen, a prison listed as 'open' is nonetheless run as a 'closed' prison. The population fluctuates between 30 and 60 inmates who go from there to other prisons; seven of them were recently transferred to Soria. One should also mention Palencia prison, so-called 'open', that is to say that prisoners may go out to work outside, in actual fact those - as it happens only a few - who were detained there, never got out and served their sentences as if they had been in a closed prison.

At Zamora, where, as said earlier, some 50 priests are in custody, there do not seem to be any special restrictive regulations. This would be due to the fact that this prison was provisionally and hurriedly allocated to the special case of ecclesiastical offenders.

Since the creation of the Court of Public Order, the sentences passed on the accused had to be lighter than those previously imposed by the Special Courts who had to judge the offenses in relation to the Law Terrorism and Banditry. By new legislation Spain is attempting to adapt to the jurisdictions existing in what are called democratic countries. Let no-one be fooled. This legal amendment is but a facade reform, which, in its implementation proves even more unjust than the one before. When the Laws against Banditry

and Terrorism were applied, the prisoner had the advantage of getting 'conditional liberty' which represents a $\frac{1}{4}$ of his sentence: if the prisoner had shown good behaviour he was able to enjoy his liberty for the last $\frac{1}{4}$ of his sentence. It had been so for 25 consecutive years. Since the formation of this famous Court of Public Order, the prisoners sentenced by this court no longer get remission for good conduct. Why? If on paper sentences are lighter, in actual fact they are just as heavy as before, due to the fact that remission for good conduct is no longer applicable. The authorities, in order to justify the non-application of this privilege, put forward the argument that remission for good conduct is a gracious pardon and not a law. The privilege of conditional liberty (remission for good conduct) was nevertheless codified since the end of the last century. and if that were not enough, there is no doubt whatever that that the application for 25 consecutive years of this right makes it a law; as it is indeed agreed that laws are the product of established customs.

Don Jesus Gonzales del Yerro, the present General Head of Prisons, argues in the following terms: 'If the prisoner's good conduct is essential to the privilege of obtaining conditional liberty, nothing guarantees that once freed he will abandon his ideological convictions, consequently it is impossible to apply conditional liberty in his case'. Not only do they ask the prisoner to endure his sentence passively, they also want to mutilate him both mentally and intellectually; they want to turn him into some amorphous being lacking in dignity or integrity. In Jaen prison, the inmates were victims of such mental pressures; it was demanded of them that they should, in writing, undertake to renounce their ideas and no longer engage in political or syndicalist activity. The Jaen's prisoners' attitude is to be noted to their credit: all, to a man, in spite of their desire to regain their liberty, refused to sign a moral condemnation such as that one.

After having exhausted all legal means - very limited

in number - to obtain the application of conditional liberty, political prisoners from different prisons, Soria, Madrid, Jaen etc., started a series of hunger strikes from November 1968, as a protest and to claim back their legitimate rights. Those hunger strikes brought about serious physical injury to the prisoners, to the point of causing the death of one of them at Segovia prison. This was Diego Capote; He was serving a 4 years sentence, and he had only a few months to go before being at liberty. Of course, the Spanish press stifled those facts. To lend weight to the action undertaken by the prisoners, their wives started taking action to show their solidarity from the outside by occupying churches; this occasioned the intervention of the forces of public order to dislodge them. 'Sabado Grafico' the illustrated weekly, was severely punished by the Ministry of Information and Tourism for having published a brief news-bulletin on those events.

We cannot end this document without mentioning the position of the prisoners in Teruel. In that town is to be found one of the most immoral and perverted of the Penal Centres of Spain. It is a prison allocated to ordinary prisoners under the age of majority. Locked up there are the swindlers, thieves, homosexuals, in one word the dregs of capitalist society, the sad product of Catholic Spain. They also send there the political prisoners who are minors (there are a number of them there at the present time), depriving them in this way of the political prisoner status. Placed in a perverted and hostile environment, they sometimes fall victims to it. There, at the moment, are 6 ETA militants and two young 'acratas'. It is easy to appreciate the state of morale in these young people who have only just opened their eyes onto the social aspect of life, and who are in this way deprived of the stimulation and example that mature prisoners can bestow. These young people are therefore enduring a double unbearable and inhuman sentence.

The situation of political prisoners, particularly of

those we have just talked about, is such an alarming one that a group of lawyers (gathered around Me Maria Luisa who looks after some of the Soria prisoners, and Don Jaime Cortezo, eminent Madrid lawyer) sent a plea to the Ministry of Justice to ask for a relaxation in the harshness of the regulations to which those prisoners in Group A in Soria prison are subjected as previously mentioned. Don Jaime Corteza, who defended Luis Andres Bdo and to other 'acratas', told us that lawyers will do all they can, though they have little hope of obtaining satisfaction.

If political prisoners resort to action to regain their rights, it is because if they are punished they would in any case always be under permanent sanction. Who is responsible for this state of affairs? The General Head of Prisons (Direccion General de Prision) by refusing to allow them the advantages to which they are legally entitled.

In Soria the last hunger strike which started on 29 May 1969 gave rise to a sanction of 75 days in solitary. And some among the 53 prisoners, such as the young libertarian David Urbano aged 24, had his sanction lengthened to 115 days for being 'a moaner'.

This is briefly the situation of the Spanish political prisoners who are locked up in special prisons, far away from urban centres. The outside world is ignorant of their lamentable living conditions. The elite of Spanish youth is slowly dying away in prisons, without any legal redress or guarantee of any sort, in total isolation and silence carefully maintained by the press. May this news reach the consciences of those who are able to still live at liberty! May all that can be done come to be, to put an end to this penal system that has nothing to envy the practiced of the Nazis.

A group of political prisoners.

The prisoners' wives and families

I cannot end this article without saying something about the prisoners' wives and their selflessness & solidarity with their men in all their actions.

During the hunger strikes which the prisoners undertook to demand their rights, the wives made deputations to bishops and authorities. The primate of Spain received them in Toledo, promising to do all he could; but seeing that this produced no result, they then barricaded themselves up in various churches in Madrid and other cities, refusing to come out until action had been taken on their request.

All the actions undertaken by the wives have had a resounding effect on national and foreign opinion. The Spanish press was obliged to keep silence on the matter despite the outcry that this drew from its readers - the Minister of Propaganda & Tourism, Fraga Tribarde, kept it securely gagged with his policy of so-called 'freedom of the press'. A weekly, 'Sabado Grafico', which dared to mention the question, was suspended from publication and fined 50,000 pesetas. But besides the bravery of these actions, what seems to me to be the most admired in these women is the stoic strength needed for their confrontation with those formidable prison-guards.

As the prisoners pointed out, for the last hunger strike (May 1969) they were punished with 75 days of solitary confinement. On 23rd June to celebrate the 'Saint-day' of the 'primerisima dama de Espana', Senora de Franco, visits are permitted from the prisoners' children. But this year these men were still in the solitary cells and according to the rules there are no concessions for men in solitary. The prison governor, who always faithfully fulfills this rule, declared that the children would be refused entrance. The wives knowing what his intentions were hired two coaches and set off for Soria, where they presented

themselves at the prison gate, together with their children, who asked to be allowed to see their fathers.

Had it been a more human governor in charge he would no doubt have made an exception, so avoiding the spectacle of all those wives and children clamouring to see their husbands and fathers. But we have already seen what a tormentor this man was, an out and out monster, with no feelings of any sort. He roundly refused all their pleas, and the wives went through the whole town seeking support from the Provincial Governor Catholic Action, and in fact every organisation that they thought would be able to intervene on their behalf.

Nobody could persuade that anti-social fanatic to give way, but the wives' courage was rewarded by the number of ears this uproar reached in a town like Soria which had not before then been politically aware. Everyone showed disapproval of the governor's attitude over this affair, and the whole town felt something for the prisoners who now have a place in the heart of these people.

I could go on for ever telling about the activities of the prisoners' wives and families in support of their men. Suffice it to say that even those terrifying 'screws' at the prison gates (especially selected as hard cases) dread even the sight of one of these steadfast women whose visits are vital to the prisoner. His daily allowance amounts to 2/2¹/₂d - inadequate even in Spain! Without that extra food he would be in a sad way. And Soria is not easy to get to. Isolated and remote, transport costs are prohibitive and for many wives it must be only one visit a year. The regulations permit a supervised weekly visit of 20 minutes. Since many men will not even see their loved ones again for a whole year, it would seem reasonable to allow daily visits for as long as the family can stay in the town (seldom more than 3 or 4 days). But no, the diabolical governor of that living hell insists rigidly and inhumanly : "One meeting of 20 minutes only"....!

No comments!

They won, but convinced nobody

The first wave of resistance to Franco came after his victory. In reality nobody in Spain ever accepted the victory of the fascist movement as a military conquest. After the civil war thousands of Spaniards went into prison, or into exile, or were shot. The Army built monuments to its victory. It made no attempt to win over the defeated Spanish people because it recognised that they still hated the fascist regime. This is why General Franco did not try to re-establish the monarchy for 30 years and continued merely as a military dictator.

My own case is not exceptional. I was three years fighting against Franco and four years of Resistance on the run from the police with resistance groups, then 22 years in prison.

No international laws protected the Spanish prisoners, nor were there any laws to protect the people from Franco's conquest.

For instance, merely to try to get an increase in wages at work is an offence and in fact 60% of political prisoners today - even 30 years after the defeat - are solely in for attempting to augment their pay. This is a crime in Spain so far as the workers are concerned and there is no pretence at it being other than a class war.

The International Labour Commission visited Spain and reported on conditions of work, and on returning to Geneva was compelled to admit that the only way to get an increase in the living standards of Spain was to grant an amnesty to political prisoners at least for those crimes that were not an offense in other countries.

Franco has said that it would be a sign of weakness to grant an amnesty. There is one further fact: there is no automatic release after sentence has been served, and all prisoners, political or not, must wait for an act of so-called clemency before seeing the prison gates open for them.

Radio-Vatican supports a Spanish priest brought to justice

Vatican Dity - 22 December (A.F.P.)

Radio Vatican broadcast a commentary on the action brought by the Spanish authorities against Father Marino Gano, a parish priest of Madrid, wanted for having served the General Directorate of Security with a petition carrying 1,500 signatures and protesting against the tortures allegedly inflicted on Spanish political prisoners. Amongst his grievances he had also denounced the detention of workers and intellectuals.

"The Church is still alive, and if you crush Madrid's hand, it gives Rome a head-ache", declared Radio Vatican, paraphrasing St. Augustine. It added, criticising a parisian newspaper which had compared Fr Gano's case to the one of the Isolotto in Florence that Fr Gano and his superiors are in close agreement and that the Auxiliary Bishop of Madrid, Mgr. Ranon Echeren (nominated directly by the Pope) came to be a witness for the defense at the trial. Pointing to the difference between the 2 trials the radio added that the trial of Fr Gano is a law suit between "a priest and the government of his country".

After quoting the declaration of a Spanish Jesuite, Father Diaz Allegrias, professor at the Gregorian University of Rome, who fully backs the supporters of Fr Gano, the radio concluded by emphasising "the popular indignation that this affair caused in Spain."

This is an article from "Le Monde" which reflects accurately the tyrannical treatment of the prisoners. This time it is the Church that is complaining against the injustice of the situation.

The priest involved was recently condemned and relieved of his position. The Church, which has supported Franco throughout his oppressive reign, is suffering the consequences and apparently now wishes to retract - rather late in the day perhaps, but let us accept it and know them by their works.